



The Ambassador

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June 4, 2009

Dear Prime Minister Tusk:

On behalf of the people of the United States, I congratulate the Polish people as we join you in celebrating a significant milestone in the history of Poland and Europe: the twentieth anniversary of the Polish people throwing off the mantle of Communist rule. Twenty years ago today, Poland shocked the world with the first step towards free elections in the Warsaw Pact. Solidarity's decisive electoral victory launched a chain of events that returned democracy not only to Poland, but also to almost all of the former Communist states of Central and Eastern Europe. Remarkably, outside of the Balkans, the changes were largely free of violence.

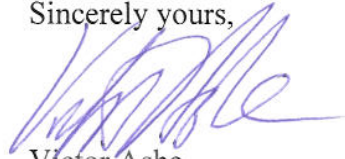
Today, we recognize the Polish election as the culmination of a movement by Polish society, encouraged by Pope John Paul II, to reclaim its rights. That effort began in earnest with the formation of Solidarity in 1980. The movement received support from U.S. President Ronald Reagan and other western leaders, and from the AFL/CIO and other international labor unions; Lech Walesa's 1983 Nobel Peace Prize was the most prominent demonstration of international support for the Solidarity movement. When Gorbachev's *glasnost* and *perestroika* created new breathing room, Solidarity and the Polish people pressed for the Round Table talks that led to the historic elections of June 4, 1989.

Many today think first of the fall of the Berlin Wall when they remember the amazing wave of freedom and democracy that swept aside the Iron Curtain in the fall of 1989. Today is a good occasion to recall that the wave began six months earlier in Warsaw. It then spread to Budapest, and when Hungary opened its borders with Austria, allowing East Germans and Czechoslovakians to flee at will to the West, Germans from both sides of Berlin tore down the Berlin wall. Communist parties soon lost power in East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Romania, and Albania. The former Soviet satellite states were suddenly free.

Poland's negotiated end of Communist rule was not as sudden as the changes in East Berlin or Prague, and the television images were less dramatic, but twenty years ago, what happened in Poland stunned the rest of the world no less. It took six or seven months for the rest of the Communist regimes west of the Soviet Union to collapse, but their foundations had already been shaken by the people of Poland.

Over the past twenty years, Poland has emerged as a regional leader, a member and leading contributor to NATO for ten years and to the EU for five years. Among this year's many significant anniversaries -- including the one marking 90 years of U.S.-Polish diplomatic relations -- one of the most important is the one we commemorate today. Please accept my congratulations to all Poles today. You and the Polish nation have every right to be proud of what you accomplished for the cause of peace, freedom and democracy on this day in 1989.

Sincerely yours,



Victor Ashe

His Excellency,  
Mr. Donald Tusk,  
Prime Minister's Chancellery,  
Warsaw, Poland.